

**Amendments to the Claims:**

1 - 2. (canceled)

3. (new) A method of detecting an imprint of a postal indicium at a location on a mail piece, comprising the steps of:

utilizing a sensor to scan along a band on the mail piece to detect a sequence of transitions between areas of light and dark reflectance within the band, the band extending across the location; and generating an indication of a presence of the imprint of the postal indicium in response to detection of a transition succeeding a predetermined number of initial transitions at a start of the sequence of transitions.

4. (new) A method according to claim 3, wherein the postal indicium includes an area in which postal data is printed in machine readable, two dimensional or data matrix form,

5. (new) A method according to claim 3, wherein the postal indicium includes cryptographic data.

6. (new) A method of processing mail, comprising the steps of:

feeding a mail piece past a print head that is operable to print a postal indicium on the mail piece; and

subsequently feeding the mail piece past detection means for detecting an imprint of the postal indicium in accordance with the method of claim 3.

7. (new) A method according to claim 6, further comprising the step of:

stopping the feeding of further mail pieces past the print head in the event that no postal indicium is detected on the mail piece.

8. (new) Apparatus for imprinting postal indicia on mail pieces, comprising:

printing means operable to print a postal indicium in a required location on the mail piece;

a first sensor responsive to reflectance transitions between areas of light and dark

reflectance along a band of the mail piece extending across the location to generate a sequence of first signals corresponding respectively to reflectance transitions along the band; and

means operative in response to a first signal occurring after a predetermined number of the first signals at a start of the sequence to generate a second signal indicative of an imprint of the postal indicium on the mail piece.

9. (new) Apparatus according to claim 8, further comprising:

a second sensor upstream of the first sensor and between the first sensor and a printing head of the printing means, wherein the second sensor is a reset sensor operatively linked to a counter for counting the number of the first signals, and configured to detect a leading edge of each mail piece and produce a signal to reset the counter.